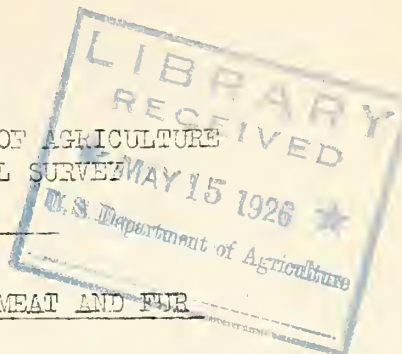


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BUREAU OF BIOLOGICAL SURVEY



CHINCHILLA RABBITS FOR MEAT AND FUR

The Chinchilla rabbit is of comparatively recent origin and made its appearance first in France and later in England. About 1918 the breed was brought to America, where it has become increasingly popular. Hardy and vigorous, it develops rapidly from birth to maturity, and can be bred successfully in almost any climate. Although attractive and exhibited extensively as a show animal, the Chinchilla is essentially a utility rabbit and is raised primarily for meat and fur.

Meat. -- The average Chinchilla weighs about 6 pounds. The body is rather short and blocky, the neck short, and the head and ears medium sized. The carcass is well fleshed, with firm, sweet, and fine-grained meat, but because of its small size it is less profitable from the meat standpoint than some of the larger breeds. A rabbit weighing 9 to 10 pounds at maturity is preferred by most commercial breeders for the reason that it is not only better for roasting but, as a breeder, produces young that at eight weeks of age will weigh 4 pounds each (2 pounds dressed). This is an essential combination if the greatest profit is to be netted.

Some of the more progressive breeders are realizing that Chinchillas of larger size would be more valuable in all ways for commercial purposes, and accordingly are attempting by selective breeding to increase the weight to 9 pounds for bucks and 10 pounds for does.

Fur. -- Well-bred Chinchilla rabbits have especially fine pelts. The fur is about an inch long, thick, soft, and silky in appearance, and in color resembles the wild South American chinchilla, in that it is a combination of slate, pearl-gray, blue, and white. The underfur is slate-blue at the base; the intermediate portion is pearl-gray, merging into white; and the end of the hair is slightly tipped with black. The long guard hairs are tipped with jet black and so arranged as to give an attractive wavy appearance.

Chinchilla pelts of good quality and color are of more than average value to the fur trade, since they are used in their natural undyed state in the manufacture of fur garments and trimmings and for other purposes. Many exaggerated statements regarding the value of pelts have been made, however, and these have had an adverse effect on the development of the rabbit industry. Promoters by featuring large profits from raising Chinchilla rabbits for fur have led the public to believe that the skins will bring five times as much as they actually do. Beginners who have thus been induced to take up the breed have been disappointed and have learned from hard experience that the claims were incorrect.

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The price paid for Chinchilla rabbit pelts depends largely upon the quality of the fur and the number of skins offered for sale. In most instances they bring considerably more than other rabbit skins, but sometimes, when only a small number of pelts are offered, no advance price is realized. Good pelts bring from \$1.00 to \$3.50 each on the raw-fur market.

Breeding. -- Chinchilla rabbits must be bred for both meat and fur if a substantial profit is to result. Although widely advertised as a fur rabbit, it is doubtful whether the Chinchilla or any other breed can be made to pay a profit if raised exclusively for fur. Marketing the meat is an important factor. American breeders have been giving considerable attention recently to color of eyes and to toe nails and the lacing on the front feet, ears, and tail. These qualities, while of weight for show purposes and pleasing to the eye of the fancier, add nothing to the value of meat or pelt.

Definite standards are necessary for the general improvement of the breed, but in striving to attain a specific standard, the size and weight of the animal and the color and density of the fur should be paramount considerations. Every effort should be made to improve these qualities, and in selecting animals for breeding purposes, the larger and better-colored individuals only should be used. The size of the Chinchilla can be gradually increased and the color of the pelt improved by careful selection, breeding, and feeding.